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Down With the Presidency

by Llewellyn H. Rockwell, Jr.

Ladies and gentlemen, the presidency must be destroyed. It is the primary evil we face, and the cause of nearly all our woes. It squanders the national wealth and starts wars against foreign governments that do not threaten us. It wrecks our families, tramples on our rights, invades our communities, and spies on our bank accounts. It skews the culture towards decadence and trash. It tells lie after lie.

Teachers used to tell schools kids that anyone can be president. This is like saying anyone can go to Hell. It's not an inspiration; it's a threat.

The presidency—by which I mean the executive state—is the sum total of American tyranny. The other branches of government, including the presidentially appointed Supreme Court, are mere adjuncts. The presidency insists on complete devotion and humble submission to its dictates, even while its steals the products of our labor and drives us into economic ruin. It centralizes all power unto itself, and crowds out all competing centers of power in society, including the church, the family, the business, the charity, and the community.

I'll go further. The U.S. presidency is the world's leading evil. It is the chief mischief-maker in every part of the globe, the leading wrecker of nations, the usurer behind third-world debt, the bailer-out of Mexico, the hand in many dictatorial gloves, the sponsor and sustainer of the New World Order, and of wars, big and small, interstate and civil, of famine and disease. To see the evils caused by the presidency, look no further than Iraq, where the lives of innocents were snuffed out in a pointless war, and where women, children, and the aged are denied essential food and medicine because of a cruel embargo.

Today, the president is called the leader of the world's only superpower, which is reason enough to have him deposed. A world with any superpower at all is a world where no freedoms are safe. But by invoking this title, the presidency attempts to keep our attention focused on foreign affairs. It is a diversionary tactic designed to keep us from noticing the oppressive rule it imposes right here in the United States.

As the presidency assumes ever more power unto itself, it becomes less and less accountable and more and more tyrannical. These days, when we say the federal government, what we really mean is the presidency. When we say, national priorities, we really mean what the presidency wants. When we say national culture, we mean what the presidency funds and imposes.

The presidency is presumed to be the embodiment of Rousseau's general will, with far more power than any monarch or head of state in pre-modern societies. The U.S. presidency is the apex of the world's biggest government and of the most expansive empire in world history. As such, the presidency represents

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P.C. Watch

Native American

When changing currents in a river in Kennewick, Washington, uncovered the intact skeleton of a white man with a stone spear-head embedded in his pelvis, anthropologists thought they had found a pioneer. But when the University of California at Riverside carbon-dated the bones, they turned out to be 9,300 years old.

Scientists want to study the ancient native American white man, but local Indians are demanding that the body be turned over to them and immediately reburied. "Our oral history goes back 10,000 years," said an elder of the Umatilla Tribe. "We know how time began and how Indian people were created. The scientists are being disrespectful."

The skulls of other ancient white men have been discovered in the area (not something you've been alerted to), but never a full skeleton.

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Scientists wonder who he was. The spear point didn't kill him (his pelvic bone had healed around it), he was about 50 years old when he died ("a veritable fossil for his era," reports the *New York Times* (9/30/96)), and he was in extremely good shape. Not all scientists are disrespectful, however. P.C. types deny that white people lived in North America in 7300 B.C., even if they can't explain the bones.

Football-Americans?

Jack Kemp, in his vice presidential debate with Al Gore, in which Gore came off as the conservative, said he wanted the government to allocate credit to "all Americans": "African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans, Female-Americans."

Two Clubs

In the campaign for the U.S. Senate seat in Georgia, Republican Guy Millner pointed out that Democrat Max Cleland had lobbied to release a killer, son of a powerful state official, who then murdered again. Far more potently, these days, Cleland retorted that his opponent was "a member of the exclusive golf club on Everglades Island in Palm Beach, Florida, that has a reputation for barring blacks and Jews. At first," reports the *New York Times* (9/26/96), "Mr. Millner refused to resign his $35,000 a year membership, and his initial explanatory utterings hooked badly into the rough. 'The island has two clubs on it: one for Jewish people and one for gentile people,' he said. 'Don't ask me to explain that. That's not the way I'd set it up, but that's the way it is.'" A few days later, he resigned, saying that he had to distance himself from anything that "even gives the hint of discrimination.'"

Turnabout

After the U.S. Congress passed the imperialistic Helms-Burton Act, allowing Americans who lost property in Cuba to sue Canadians and other foreigners in U.S. courts if they had any dealings with Cuba, and barring their executives from this country, two Canadian MPs—John Godfrey and Peter Millikin—introduced a similar bill in Parliament.

But this bill would allow the descendants of American Loyalists—Tories in the American Revolution—to sue to reclaim their confiscated estates in the U.S. It would also allow Canada to bar executives, and their wives and children—like the U.S. law—if they traffick in expropriated land. If they can get the act approved, both MPs intend to demand the return of their ancestors land, which was taken without compensation, in Virginia and New York (*Harper's*, 10/96).

Justice at Last

The *Los Angeles Times* is furious (9/30/96): Sgt. Stacy Koon, sentenced to 30 months in prison for his part in subduing career criminal, wife slicer, and drunk driver Rodney King, will not be sent back to jail by a federal judge. Worse, supporters have raised $8.8 million for a trust fund for Koon and his family, more than the $3.8 million King got from the taxpayers for his arrest.

Confederate-Americans?

Allegedly outrageous (but actually tame) neocon movie critic Joe Queenan shows us his sensitive side: "I have never had the faintest idea what people are talking about when they refer to 'Gone With the Wind' as a great movie. I have always found it a ridiculous movie, with an idiotically affectionate attitude towards the Confederacy. Yes, it is well-filmed and well-acted, but its story line is preposterous. I thing we would all have a hard time finding African-Americans who think that 'Gone With the Wind' is a great movie" (*Slate*, 9/30/96, and thanks to Peter Klein).

Clinton's Latest Outrage

The *Weekly Standard* (9/30/96) is angry. At a speech in Iowa, Bill Clinton said he was glad to see "German-Americans" in the crowd. "What led Clinton to identify some people as having German ancestry?" demanded the *Standard*. "Does he have some special ethnographic perception—a visual acuity similar to Henry Higgins's ability to discern the location of a speaker's street merely by accent?" ☒

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the opposite of freedom. It is what stands between us and our goal of restoring our ancient rights.

And let me be clear: I'm not talking about any particular inhabitant of the White House. I'm talking about the institution itself, and the millions of unelected, unaccountable bureaucrats who are its acolytes. Look through the U.S. government manual, which breaks down the federal establishment into its three branches. What you actually see is the presidential trunk, its Supreme Court stick, and its Congressional twig. Practically everything we think of as federal—save the Library of Congress—operates under the aegis of the executive.

This is why the governing elites—and especially the foreign policy elites—are so intent on maintaining public respect for the office, and why they seek to give it the aura of holiness. For example, after Watergate, they briefly panicked and worried that they had gone too far. They might have discredited the democratic autocracy. And to some extent they did.

But the elites were not stupid: they were careful to insist that the Watergate controversy was not about the presidency as such, but only about Nixon as a man. That's why it became necessary to separate the two. How? By keeping the focus on Nixon, making a devil out of him, and reveling in the details of his personal life, his difficulties with his mother, his supposed pathologies, etc.

Of course, this didn't entirely work. Americans took from Watergate the lesson that presidents will

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lie to you. This should be the first lesson of any civics course, of course, and the first rule of thumb in understanding the affairs of government. But notice that after Nixon died, he too was elevated to godlike status. None other than Bill Clinton served as high priest of the cult of president-worship on that occasion. He did everything but sacrifice a white bull outside the temple of the White House.

The presidency recovered most of its old godlike status during the Reagan years. How wonderful, for the sake of our liberties, that Clinton has revived the great American tradition of scorning tyrants. Of course, someday, Clinton too will ascend to the clouds, and enter the pantheon of the great leaders of the free world.

The libraries are filled with shelf after shelf of treatises on the American presidency. Save yourself some time, and don't bother with them. Virtually all tell the same story. Whether written by liberals or conservatives, they serve up the identical Whiggish pap: the history of the presidency is the story of a great and glorious institution. It was opposed early on, and viciously so, by the anti-federalists, and later, even more viciously, by Southern Confederates. But it has been heroically championed by every respectable person since the beginning of the republic.

The office of the presidency, the conventional wisdom continues, has changed not at all in substance, but has grown in stature, responsibility, and importance, to fulfill its unique mission on earth. As the duties of the office have grown, so has the greatness of the men who inhabit it. Each stands on the shoulders of his forerunners, and, inspired by their vision and decisiveness, goes on to make his own contribution to the ever-expanding magisterium of presidential laws, executive orders, and national security findings.

When there is a low-ebb in the accumulation of power, it is the fault of the individual and not the office. Thus the so-called postage-stamp presidents between Lincoln and Wilson are to be faulted for not following the glorious example set by Abe. They had a vast reservoir of power, but were mysteriously reluctant to use it. Fortunately that situation was resolved, by Wilson especially, and we moved onward and upward into the light of the present day. And every one of these books ends with the same conclusion: the U.S. presidency has served us well.

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The hagiographers do admit one failing of the American presidency. It is almost too big an office for one man, and too much a burden to bear. The American people have come to expect too much from the president. We are unrealistic to think that one man can do it all. But that's all the more reason to respect and worship the man who agrees to take it on, and why all enlightened people must cut him some slack.

The analogy that comes to mind is the official history of the popes, and I say this as a Catholic. In its infancy, the papacy was less formal, but its power and position were never in question. As the years went on and doctrine developed, so too did the burdens of office. Each pope inherited the wisdom of his forbears, and led the Church into fulfilling its mission more effectively.

But let's be clear about this. The Church has never claimed that the papacy was the product of human effort. And even the official history admits the struggles with anti-popes and Borgia popes, and someday Vatican II popes.

Catholics believe the institution was founded by Christ, and is guided by the Holy Spirit, but the pope can only invoke that guidance in the most narrow and rare circumstances. Otherwise, he is all too fallible. And that is why, although allegedly an absolute monarch, he is actually bound by the rule of law.

The U.S. presidency is seemingly bound by law as well, but in practice it can do just about anything it pleases. It can order up troops anywhere in the world, just as Clinton bragged in his acceptance speech at the Democratic convention. It can plow up a religious community in Texas and bury its members because they got on somebody's nerves at the Justice Department. It can tap our phones, read our mail, watch our bank accounts, and tell us what we can and cannot eat, drink, and smoke.

Dean of the Austrian School of Economics, founder of modern libertarianism, and restorer of the Old Right, Murray N. Rothbard (1926–1995) was a one-man army of liberty. The *RRR* is inspired by his spirit, and dedicated to his vision.

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The presidency can break up businesses, shut down airlines, void drilling leases, arrest foreign heads of state and try them in kangaroo courts, firebomb crops in Columbia, overthrow any government anywhere, erect tariffs, round up and discredit any public or private assembly it chooses, grab our guns, tax our incomes and our inheritances, steal our land, centrally plan the national and world economy, and impose embargoes on anything anytime. No prince or pope ever had this ability.

But leave all that aside and consider this nightmare. The president has the power to bring about a nuclear holocaust with the push of a button. On his own initiative, he can destroy the human race. One man can wipe out life on earth. Talk about playing God. This is a grotesque evil. And the White House claims it is not a tyranny? If the power to destroy the entire world isn't tyrannical, I don't know what is. Why do we put up with this? Why do we allow this to be the case? Why isn't this power immediately stripped from him?

On his own initiative, the president can destroy the human race.

What prevents fundamental challenge to this monstrous power is precisely the quasi-religious trappings of the presidency, which we will again have to suffer through during this January's coronation ceremonies. One man who saw the religious significance of the presidency, and denounced it in 1973, was—surprisingly enough—Michael Novak. His study, *Choosing Our King: Powerful Symbols in Presidential Politics*, is one of the few dissenting books on the subject. It was reissued last year as—not surprisingly—as *Choosing Our Presidents: Symbols of Political Leadership*, with a new introduction repudiating the best parts of the book.

Of course, none of the conventional bilge accords with reality. The U.S. president is the worst outgrowth of a badly flawed Constitution. Even from the beginning, the presidency was accorded too much power. Indeed, an honest history would have to admit that the presidency has been an instrument of oppression, from the Whisky Rebellion to Ruby Ridge.

It has systematically stolen the liberty won through the secession from Britain. From Jackson and Lincoln to McKinley and Teddy Roosevelt, from Wilson and FDR to Truman and Kennedy, from Nixon and Reagan to Bush and Clinton, it has been the means by which our rights to liberty, property, and self government have been suppressed. I can count on one hand the actions of presidents that actually favored the true American cause, meaning liberty. The overwhelming history of the presidency is a tale of overthrown rights and liberties, and the erection of despotism in their stead.

Each president has tended to be worse than the last, especially in this century. In our own times, in terms of the powers they assumed and the dictates they imposed, Kennedy was worse than Eisenhower, Johnson was worse than Kennedy, Nixon was worse than Johnson, Carter was worse than Nixon, and Reagan—who doubled the national budget and permanently entrenched the warfare state—was worse than Carter. The same is true of Bush and Clinton. Every budget is bigger and the powers exercised more egregious. Each new brutal action breaks another taboo, and establishes a new precedent that gives the next occupant of the White House more leeway.

Looking back through American history, we can see the few exceptions to this rule. Washington made a great farewell address, laying out the proper American trade and foreign policy. Jefferson's revolution of 1800 was a great thing. But was it really a freer country after his term than before? That's a tough case to make. Andrew Jackson abolished the central bank, a wonderful action, but his legacy was democratic centralism and weakened states rights.

Andrew Johnson presided over a loosening of the military dictatorship fastened on the South after the war. But it is not hard to make the country freer when it had become totalitarian under the previous president's rule. Of course, Lincoln's unaccountable autocracy survived as the model of presidential leadership. James Buchanan made a great statement on behalf of the right of revolution. Grant restored the gold standard. Harding denounced U.S. imperialism in Haiti. But overall, my favorite president is William Henry Harrison. He keeled over shortly after his inauguration.

There have been four huge surveys taken of historians' views on the presidents: in 1948, in 1962, in 1970, and in 1983. Historians were asked to rank presidents as Great, Near Great, Average, Below Average, and Failure. In every case, number one is Lincoln, the mass murderer and military dictator who is the real father of the present nation. His term was a model of every despot's dream: spending money without Congressional approval, declaring martial laws, arbitrarily arresting thousands and holding them without trial, suppressing free speech and the free press, handing out lucrative war contracts to his cronies, raising taxes, inflating the currency, and killing a lot of "enemies."

These are just the sort of actions historians love. The number two winner in these competitions is FDR. Moreover, Wilson and Jackson are always in the top five. The bottom two in every case are Grant and Harding. None even bothered to rate William Henry Harrison.

What does greatness in the presidency mean? It means waging war, crushing liberties, imposing

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socialism, issuing dictates, browbeating and ignoring Congress, appointing dictatorial judges, expanding the domestic and global empire, and generally trying his best to be an all-round enemy of freedom and self government. It means saying with Lincoln, that "I have a right to take any measure which may best subdue the enemy."

The key to winning the respect of historians is to do these things. All aspirants to this vile office know this. It's what they seek. They long for crisis, power, to be bullies in pulpits, to be the dictators they are in their hearts. They want, at all costs, to avoid the fate of being another "postage-stamp president." Madison said no man with power deserves to be trusted. Neither should we trust any man who seeks the power that the presidency offers.

Accordingly, it is all well and good that conservatives have worked to discredit the current occupant of the White House. Call him a philanderer, a cheat, and a double dealer if you want. Call him a tyrant too. But we must go much further. The answer to restoring republican freedom has nothing to do with replacing Clinton with Dole, or Dole with Kemp, Heaven forbid, or Kemp with Buchanan. The structure of the presidency and the religious aura that surrounds iy must be destroyed. The man is merely a passing occupant of the Holy Chair of St. Abraham. It is the chair itself that must be reduced to kindling.

It was never the intention of the majority of framers to create the mess we have, of course. After the war for independence, the Articles of Confederation had no chief executive. Its decisions were made by a five-member Confederation. The Confederation had no power to tax. All its decisions required the agreement of nine of the thirteen states. That is the way it should be.

Most of the delegates to the unfortunate Philadelphia convention hated executive power. They had severely restricted the governors of their states, after their bitter experience with the colonial governors. The new governors had no veto, and no power over the legislature. Forrest McDonald reports that one quarter of the delegates to the convention wanted a plural executive, based loosely on the Articles model. But those who planned the convention wanted a single, strong executive, including Gouverneur Morris, Washington, and Hamilton, and they out-maneuvered the various strains of anti-federalists.

But listen to how they did it. The people of the several states and their representatives were suspicious that Hamilton wanted to create a monarchy. Now, there's much mythology surrounding this point. It's not that the anti-federalists and the popular will opposed some guy strutting around in a crown and sitting on a throne. It was not monarchy as such they hated and opposed, but the power the king exercised.

The structure of the presidency and the religious aura that surrounds must be destroyed.

When they said they didn't want a monarch, they meant they didn't want a King George, they didn't want a tyrant, an autocrat, an executive. It was the tyrannical end they feared, and not the royal means.

Indeed, formally, the Constitution gives few powers to the president, and few duties, most of them subject to approval by the legislature. The most important provision regarding the presidency is that the holder of the office can be impeached. It was to be a threat constantly hanging over his head. It was to be threatened often and used against any president who dared gather more power unto himself than the Constitution prescribed.

In one famous outburst, Hamilton was forced to defend himself against the charge that the new office of the presidency was a monarchy in disguise. He explained the difference between a monarch and a president. But as you listen to this, think about the present executive. Ask yourself whether he resembles the thing Hamilton claimed to have created in the office of the presidency, or whether we have the tyrant he claimed to be repudiating.

Among other points, Hamilton said in "Federalist 69":

"The President of the United States would be liable to be impeached, tried, and, upon conviction...removed from office; and would afterwards be liable to prosecution and punishment in the ordinary course of law. The person of the king of Great Britain is sacred and inviolable; there is no constitutional tribunal to which he is amenable; no punishment to which he can be subjected...

"The President will have only the occasional command of such part of the militia of the nation as by legislative provision may be called into the actual service of the Union.... [The power] of the British king extends to the *declaring* of war and to the *raising* and regulating of fleets and armies—all which, by the Constitution under consideration, would appertain to the legislature....

"The President is to have power, with the advice and consent of the Senate, to make treaties, provided two thirds of the senators present concur. The King of Great Britain is the sole and absolute representative of the nation in all foreign transactions. He can of his own accord make treaties of peace, commerce, alliance, and of every other description....

"The President is to nominate and, *with the advice and consent of the Senate*, to appoint ambassadors and other public ministers.... The king of Great Britain is emphatically and truly styled the fountain of honor. He

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not only appoints to all offices, but can create offices. He can confer titles of nobility at pleasure...and...[even] make denizens of aliens.

"[The president] can prescribe no rules concerning the commerce or currency of the nation; [the king] is in several respects the arbiter of commerce, and in this capacity can establish markets and fairs, can regulate weights and measures, can lay embargoes for a limited time, can coin money.... What answer shall we give to those who would persuade us that things so unlike resemble each other?"

All this would be destroyed by Lincoln, who fundamentally changed the nature of the government, as even his apologists admit.

Well, we can debate all day whether Hamilton was naive about what he was creating or whether he was a despicable liar. But the fact remains that in his writings, despite his reputation as a backer of the imperial presidency, he is by today's standards a Congressional supremacist. For that matter, and in comparison with today's presidency, so was the British king.

Most historians agree that there would have been no presidency apart from George Washington, who was trusted by the people as a true gentleman, and was presumed to understand what the American revolution was all about. But he got off track by attempting to suppress the Whisky Rebellion, although he at least acknowledged that his actions went beyond the strict letter of the Constitution. But though the presidency quickly spun out of control, at its antebellum worst it had nothing in common with today's executive state.

In those days, you could live your life and never even notice that the presidency existed. You had no contact with it. Most people couldn't vote anyway, thank goodness, and you didn't have to, but certain rights and freedoms were guaranteed regardless of whoever took hold of this—by today's standards—largely ceremonial position. The presidency couldn't tax you, draft you, or regulate your trade. It couldn't inflate your money, steal your kids, or impose itself on your community. From the standpoint of the average American, the presidency was almost invisible.

Listen to what de Tocqueville observed in 1831. "The President is...the executor of the laws; but he does not really co-operate in making them, since the refusal of his assent does not prevent their passage. He is not, therefore, a part of the sovereign power, but only its agent.... The president is placed beside the legislature like an inferior and dependent power...."

And listen to this:

The office of president of the United States is "temporary, limited, and subordinate.... [W]hen he is at the head of government he has but little power, little wealth, and little glory to share among his friends; and his influence in the state is too small for the success or the ruin of a faction to depend upon his elevation to power.... The influence which the President exercises on public business is no doubt feeble and indirect."

Thirty years later, all this would be destroyed by Lincoln, who fundamentally changed the nature of the government, as even his apologists admit. He became a Caesar, in complete contradiction to most of the framers intentions. As Acton said, he abolished the primary contribution that America had made to the world, the principle of federalism. But that is an old story.

Less well known is how Wilson revived Lincoln's dictatorial predilections, and added to them an even more millennial cast. Moreover, this was his intention before he was elected. In 1908, while still president of Princeton, he wrote a small book entitled *The President of the United States*. It was a paean to the imperial presidency, and might as well be the bible of every president who followed him. He went beyond Lincoln, who praised the exercise of power. Wilson longed for a Presidential Messiah to deliver the human race.

"There can be no successful government," Wilson begins, "without leadership or without the intimate, almost instinctive, coordination of the organs of life and action.... We have grown more and more from generation to generation to look to the President as the unifying force in our complex system.... To do so is not inconsistent with the actual provisions of the Constitution; it is only inconsistent with a very mechanical theory of its meaning and intention."

Continuing on: The president must be a "man who understands his own day and the needs of the country, and who has the personality and the initiative to enforce his views both upon the people and upon Congress.... He is not so much part of its organization as its vital link of connection with the thinking nation...he is also the political leader of the nation.... The nation as a whole has chosen him.... Let him once win the admiration and confidence of the country, and no other single force can withstand him, no combination of forces will easily overpower him. His position takes the imagination of the country. He is the representative of no constituency, but of the whole people.... the country never feels the zest of action so much as when its President is of such insight and caliber. Its instinct is for unified action, and it craves a single leader."

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"...The President is at liberty, both in law and conscience, to be as big a man as he can. His capacity will set the limit...he is the only spokesman of the whole people. [Finally, Presidents should regard] themselves as less and less executive officers and more and more directors of affairs and leaders of the nation,—men of counsel and of the sort of action that makes for enlightenment."

Ladies and gentlemen, this is not a theory of the presidency. It is the hope for a new messiah. That indeed is what the presidency has come to. But I tell you today that any man who accepts this view is not a free man. He is not a man who understands what constitutes civilized life. The man who accepts what Wilson calls for is an apostle of total state and a defender of collectivism and despotism.

Conservatives used to understand this. In the last century, all the great minds—men like John Randolph and John Taylor and John C. Calhoun—did. In this century, the right was born in reaction to the imperial presidency. Men like Albert Jay Nock, Garet Garrett, John T. Flynn, and Felix Morley called the FDR presidency what it was: a U.S. version of the dictatorships that arose in Russia and Germany, and a profound evil draining the very life of the nation.

They understood that FDR had brought both the Congress and the Supreme Court under his control. He had shredded what was left of the Constitution, and set the stage for all the consolidation that followed. Later presidents were free to nationalize the public schools, administer the economy according to the dictates of crackpot Keynesian economics, tell us who we must and who we must not associate with, nationalize the police function, and run an egalitarian regime that extols non-discrimination as the sole moral tenet, when it is clearly not a moral tenet at all. Later conservatives like James Burnham, Wilmoore Kendall, and Robert Nisbet, understood this point too.

Yet who do modern conservatives extol? Lincoln, Wilson, and FDR. Reagan spoke of them as gods and models, and so did Bush. In the 1980s, we were told that *Congress* was the imperial branch of government because Tip O'Neill had a few questions about Reagan's tax-and-spend military buildup, and his strategy for fostering global warfare while managing world affairs through the CIA. All this was bolstered by books by Harvey Mansfield, Terry Eastland, and dozens of other neoconservatives who pretended to provided some justification for presidential supremacy and its exercise of global rule. More recently Pat Buchanan even repeated the admonition of John F. Kennedy, that we should submit our wills to the nation-state.

The continued centralization of government in the presidency represents the end of America and its civilization.

What the neocon logic comes down to is this. The U.S. has a moral responsibility to run the world. But the citizens are too stupid to understand this. That's why we can't use democratic institutions like Congress in this ambition. We must use the executive power of the presidency. It must have total control over foreign affairs, and never bow to Congressional carping.

Once this point is conceded, the game is over. The demands of a centralized and all-powerful presidency and its interventionist foreign policy are ideologically reinforcing. One needs the other. If the presidency is supreme in global affairs, it will be supreme in domestic affairs. If it is supreme at home, there will be no states rights, no absolute property rights, no true liberty from government oppression. The continued centralization of government in the presidency represents the end of America and its civilization.

A key part of the theory of presidential supremacy in foreign affairs is the idea that politics stops at the water's edge. If you believe that, you have given up everything. It means that foreign affairs will continue to be the last refuge of an omnipotent scoundrel. If a president can count on the fact that he won't be criticized so long as he is running a war, he will run more of them. So long as he is running wars, government at home cannot be cut. As Felix Morley said, "Politics can stop at the water's edge only when policies stop at the water's edge."

Sadly, the Congress for the most part cares nothing about foreign policy. In that, it reflects the attitude of the American voter. The exception is the handful of Congressmen who do speak about foreign issues, usually at the behest of the State Department, the CIA, the Pentagon, and the increasingly global FBI. Such men are mere adjuncts of presidential power.

In fact, it is the obligation of every patriot not only to denounce a president's actions at home, but to question, harass, and seek to rein in the presidency when it has sent troops abroad. That is when the watchful eye of the citizenry is most important. If we hold our tongues under some mistaken notion of patriotism, we surrender what remains of our freedoms. Yet during the Gulf War, even those who had courageously opposed this intervention in advance mouthed the old cliches about politics and the water's edge and supporting the troops when the presidency started massacring Iraqis.

If there is ever a time to get behind a president, it is when he withdraws from the world, stops wars,

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and brings the troops home. If there is ever a time to trip him up, question his leadership, and denounce his usurpations, it is when he does the opposite. A bipartisan foreign policy is a Napoleonic foreign policy, and the opposite of that described by Washington in his farewell address.

In the midst of America's war against Britain in 1812, John Randolph wrote an open letter to his Virginia constituents, pleading with them not to support the war, and he promised them he would not, for he knew where war led. "If you and your posterity," he promised, "are to become hewers of wood and drawers of water to the modern Pharaoh, it shall not be for the want of my best exertions to rescue you from cruel and abject bondage."

Sixty years ago all conservatives would have agreed with this and cheered. But the neoconservative onslaught has purged conservatives of their instinctive suspicions of presidential power.

By the time 1994 had come around, conservatives had been thoroughly indoctrinated in the theory that Congress was out of control, and that the executive branch needed more power. The leadership of the 104th congress—dominated to a man by neocons and presidential supremacists—bamboozled the freshmen into pushing for three executive-enhancing measures.

In one of the Congress's first actions, it made itself subject to the oppressive civil rights and labor laws that the executive enforced against the rest of the nation. This was incredibly stupid. The Congress was exempted from these for a reason. It prevented the executive from using its own regulatory agencies to lord it over Congress. By making itself subject to these laws, Congress willingly submitted itself to implicit and explicit domination by the Department of Labor, the Department of Justice, and the EEOC. It imposed quotas and political correctness on itself, while any dissenters from the presidential line suddenly faced the threat of investigation and prosecution by those they were attempting to rein in.

The imposition of these laws against Congress is a clear violation of the separation of powers. But it would not be the last time that this Congress made this mistake. It also passed the line-item veto, another violation of the separation of powers. The theory was that the president would strike out pork, pork being defined as property taken by taxation and redistributed to special interests. But since pork is all there is in the federal government's $1.7 trillion budget, this has given the president wide latitude over Congress. It takes away from Congress the right to control the purse strings.

Today's presidency is by definition in violation of the Constitution. Talk of impeachment ought to become routine.

Even before it has gone into effect, we can already seen the way the line-item veto operates. The other day, the president made it clear that he wanted an additional $6.7 billion to spend. He will also be in a position to veto any spending approved by Congress. Thus if you have a favorite program that you don't want the president to veto, you'd better hedge your bets by going along with what he wants. You vote for his spending, and he won't veto yours. The line-item veto invites the biggest pig of them all up to the trough to tell the smaller pigs they can continue to eat so long as the big pig always gets his fill. A priority of a real Congress should be to repeal the line-item veto and take back control over the purse strings.

Also part of the Contract with America was term limits for Congress. This would represent a severe diminution of Congressional power with respect to the presidency. After all, it would not mean term limits for the permanent bureaucracy or for federal judges, but only for the one branch the people can actually control. Thank goodness the self-interest of the politicians themselves prevented it from coming into being.

After that initial burst of energy, this Congress surrendered everything to the Clinton White House: control of the budget, control of foreign affairs, and control of the Federal Reserve and the FBI. The Justice Department operates practically without oversight, as does the Treasury, HUD, Transportation, Commerce, EPA, the SEC, the FTC, and the FDA.

Congress has given in on point after point, eventually even granting the presidency most of what it demanded in health-care reform, including mandated equal coverage of the mentally ill. Chalk it up to long term planning. They came into office pledging to curb government, but are leaving as infatuated with the presidency as Clinton himself. After all, they hope their party will regain the office.

After all this, the Republicans have the audacity to ask in bewilderment: why is the president ahead of Dole in the polls? What have we done wrong? The real question is what have they done right? James Burnham said that the legislature is useless unless it is curbing the presidency. By that measure, this Congress has been worthless. It deserves to lose its majority. And its party deserves to lose the presidency, whose powers they are so anxious to grab for themselves.

The best moments in this Congress were when a few freshmen talked quietly of impeachment. Indeed it is their responsibility to talk loudly, openly, and constantly of impeachment. Today's presidency is

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by definition in violation of the Constitution. Talk of impeachment ought to become routine. So should ridicule and humiliation. For if we care about liberty, the plebiscitory dictatorship must be reined in or tossed out.

John Randolph had only been a Senator for a few days, when he gave an extraordinary speech denouncing John Quincy Adams. "It is my duty," he said, "to leave nothing undone that I may lawfully do, to pull down this administration.... They who, from indifference, or with their eyes open, persist in hugging the traitor to their bosom, deserve to be insulted...deserve to be slaves, with no other music to sooth them but the clank of the chains which they have put on themselves and given to their offspring."

John Randolph said this in 1826. It was a time, writes Tocqueville, when the presidency was almost invisible. If we cannot say this and more today, when the presidency is dictator to the world, we are no Randolphians. Indeed, we are no free men.

Presented at the 7th annual meeting of the John Randolph Club near Washington, D.C., on October 5, 1996. ☒

A Nondebate

by Paul Gottfried

After watching the first presidential debate in Hartford, Conn., I find that my impressions of this event differ profoundly from those of the media. It is not just the usual neocon-Republican voices like George Will, Brent Bozell, and the *WSJ* that have been raised in defense of Dole's "credible" performance. The *Wall Street Journal* devoted a long tortured editorial to assuring us that "Dole did pretty well for himself." The same theme has come from official liberal news interpreters whom I listened to on the major networks following the debate. Though a *Newsweek* poll taken immediately afterwards showed 21 percent more Americans gave the edge to Clinton than Dole, the TV talking heads and liberal academics interviewed by the Lancaster, Penn., newspapers had the contest too close to call. One recurrent statement in these analyses is that Dole and Clinton had represented "two opposing worldviews"; each had adequately defended his own "philosophy."

Dole "cares" about the "handicapped like myself," crack babies in the arms of welfare mothers, and Older Americans on Medicare.

From what I heard Clinton had trounced his Republican opponent, who tried to sound as much like a Democrat as he could. Clinton had represented big government positions with apparent erudition and with a semblance of grace. Dole, by contrast, had alternated between sniping at Clinton's hippie past and assuring his listeners that he "really cared." What he claimed to care about are "the handicapped like myself," crack babies in the arms of welfare mothers, Older Americans on Medicare, and others who depend on entitlements. Dole expressed his wish to care for all of these groups, by maintaining or expanding government programs. When Clinton leveled the accusation that Dole had voted against the Department of Education, Dole did admit to being critical of the NEA, but then went on to list federal educational programs he had supported or would like to enact.

In addition to advocating big government at home, Dole took interventionist stands on foreign affairs that recalled the worst grandstanding of the Cold War era. He chided Clinton for not doing enough about Cuba and called for stronger measures against Castro. Through these ill-conceived and clumsy remarks Dole was groveling for Cuban votes in Florida. The groveling was too plain to be missed and raises questions about Dole's capacity to deal with international relations independently of Cold War clichés and a never-ending quest for votes.

Worst of all, his delivery suggested the absence of oratorical and cognitive skills. Dole did not respond in the debate, except by falling back on set speeches prepared in advance. Whatever his opponent said, Dole kept returning to the same predictable stances: pouncing on Clinton's lack of remorse about having inhaled marijuana, dramatizing his desire for a bigger national drug program, trying to elicit sympathy by pointing to his own handicap, and promising to deliver a tax reduction that seemed implausible in the light of his other promises. These were things that Dole intended to talk about, regardless of where the debate was supposed to go. Though a kindly moderator, Jim Lehrer, hoped to point him beyond this fixed script, Dole did not take the hint. Never did he address the juicy social issues, like illegal immigration, job quotas, and ninth-month abortions. These might have seemed "divisive" to the yuppie constituency that he was obviously courting; moreover, the mention of significant points of difference between him and Clinton might have made liberal journalists uncomfortable.

The question here is why should Dole care about the reaction of liberals to any hypothetical move on his part to the social right. What advantage is there for him in the face of Clinton's predictive landslide to impersonate a "moderate"? "Moderate" (a.k.a. liberal) votes are already in Clinton's camp and by now the Republican right is growing

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disgusted with its putative standard-bearer, who keeps running away from it. Last week when Dole addressed a gathering at my own college, most of the audience were self-identified conservatives. The only comments in his rambling speech for which I heard enthusiastic applause was a social stand that never came up in his presidential debate, his opposition to partial-birth abortions. The rest of the disjointed presentation, mostly about the arithmetic of his tax plan, was simply endured by those who attended.

The good old times, as Russell Baker pointed out, indicates indifference toward homophobia, racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism.

The media undoubtedly have Dole worried that unless he "moderates" his social conservatism, he will surely be crushed on Election Day. Alas this will be his fate, as both the polls and Dole's debating performance indicate. Contrary to the media's interpretation, Dole is not driving away socially liberal but fiscally conservative *Republican* voters. If such a type exists there is no way of keeping it in the Republican Party, except by having that party embrace Bill Clinton. In any case these fiscally conservative social liberals whom journalists extol are no more reluctant to give the government economic power than they are about surrendering other powers to the state. They are yuppies who want to make money but do not challenge the welfare or therapeutic state, as long as their own taxes are not unduly raised. And their heroes William Weld and Christine Whitmann have not done particularly well even in that respect, though they have enacted gay-rights and hate-speech laws.

Dole has lost the most ground among core Republican voters, not problematic yuppie ones. The Christian right, which stupidly helped Dole get the nomination, has now woken up and is angry about his avoidance of moral issues. At a recent gathering of Christian-right activists and ministers in central Pennsylvania which I attended, the pervasive attitude toward Dole was contempt. One doubts that his debating style has changed that attitude.

As for the media sympathy shown toward him after the debate debacle, there may be several valid explanations. One, the media does not want to see Dole fade weeks before the election. Unless the outcome of the race can be made to look uncertain, the public will lose interest in both election news and its bearers. It is therefore in the media's material interest to make the race appear to be narrowing rather than widening. Two, after having made abundantly clear where their political loyalties lie, the media may be bending backward to be nice to Dole. Particularly when the race has been all but officially decided, there can be no harm for their side if known liberal Democrats pat a collapsing Dole on the back. About the public verdict there can no longer be any doubt, so why should the media not cut Dole a break, while giving the appearance of being consistently even-handed?

Three, the media were rewarding Dole for not raising "insensitive" issues. This may be the most noteworthy reason for their concealment of his forensic ineptitude, that he paid them the tribute of not opening social questions which they had decided to close. In late September, they gave Dole a taste of what might be in store for him if he pursued illegal immigration as a campaign issue. For several days all the major networks blasted him as the enemy of inclusiveness and "human rights." There might have been a second, extended round of the same treatment, if Dole had not dropped the social questions, but being Dole he did: he went back to snarling his concern about the maim and the halt and promising tax cuts while enlisting the entire nation to fight Castro and drugs.

And no longer does he reminisce about the old America in which he grew up. The media had railed against that kind of thinking, when he dared to reveal it in comments about Russell, Kansas, in his presidential acceptance speech. Talking about the good old times, as Russell Baker among dozens of journalists pointed out, indicates indifference toward homophobia, racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism. All of these evils had once abounded, until Americans were resocialized by a caring state. Dole has taken the scolding to heart and now joined Clinton in building bridges to an ever improving future.

Despite their having used him as a punching bag, the media may be relenting and treating Dole as a useful idiot. His job, from their perspective, was to pull national politics to back home, together with a rosy view of his debate, once the election is over.

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In conclusion it should be noted that Dole has made the strategic mistake of choosing for himself the model of Christine Whitmann's winning over Jim Florio in the New Jersey gubernatorial race of 1992. This has remained for him and his staff the model to be followed even after the Hartford debate, according to the *WSJ*. Like Whitmann, Dole intends to focus on tax cuts, without frontally challenging liberal social stands or appearing to be an entitlement-cutter. But Dole, who has not had the stomach to take on the media, has picked a questionable role model. Whitmann, unlike Dole, ran against an extremely unpopular politician, who was hated by a majority of the inhabitants of his state. Whitmann should have been able to beat Florio without having to rely on a come-from-behind victory. That she did, and even used Ed Rollins to pay off blacks not to vote for her opponent, indicates the drawbacks of her liberal Republican persona. Whitmann barely won while running away from core Republican voters and picking up disgruntled Democrats. Dole cannot possibly win by doing the same. ⊠

The Crazy Theory Behind School Vouchers

by Michael Levin

Much soft-headed Republican talk about school choice raises the issue of what education in a free society might look like. Certainly school vouchers would be banished.

Giving parents money "to send their children where they please" sounds liberating and capable of imposing the discipline of competition on complacent public schools. Teachers unions hate the idea, taken to be a good sign. But the Devil is in the details, which are Satanic indeed.

The two key questions are: who will get the vouchers, and how will they be financed? The voucher systems now in effect in Milwaukee and Cleveland, and in the plan outlined by Bob Dole during this presidential campaign, are reserved for low and "moderate" income families.

The funds, of course, are public, either from state treasuries or, in the Dole plan, from federal coffers as well. Advocates describe the $2,500 given to each pupil annually in the Milwaukee plan as "Wisconsin's share of per-pupil spending," but Wisconsin has no money. Only its taxpayers do, and they have no choice about footing the bill.

Since a voucher for parents paying more than $2,500 in taxes would simply be a tax refund along with rules about spending it, "choice" for them is better served simply by lowering taxes. But the basic aim of vouchers is not to let productive parents and their children invest their resources as they please; it is to transfer their resources to the poor.

Of course, the productive sector already subsidizes the education of the poor. There is little difference between giving the poor access to public schools supported by more affluent taxpayers, and giving them the money it takes to run those schools. But here is the really sinister bit: vouchers are to be honored not only by public schools, but also be private schools, including religious ones. Middle-class parents paying private school tuition to avoid the public schools they finance will awake to find that public schools can no longer be avoided. The very children the middle class is fleeing will turn up at the private school door, vouchers in hand, demanding admission.

Let's be honest. People (black and white) do not shun an abstraction called Public Education but its present *student* body, in most large cities is more than 75 percent black and Hispanic. On average, these children perform two or more grades behind whites and Asians in all academic subjects, and are far more disruptive. There is no reason to think they will miraculously become apt, obedient pupils if moved from "bad" public schools to "good" private ones. After all, what makes a school good is not its physical location, but the quality of its students and teachers.

The crazy theory behind vouchers is that minority children fail because of concentrated "peer pressure"; let them escape their peers and they will flourish. But these nefarious peers are simply...other minority children. You might as well argue that criminals go bad because they are all put in prisons. And don't expect private schools to retain admission standards that exclude troublesome voucher-bearers, for any such standards would doubtless be found to violate civil rights laws. Every extant voucher plan forbids their use at "discriminatory" institutions.

The issue of choice is not whether the opinions held my many parents about minorities or admission standards are justified, but whether parents may choose to act on those opinions. By imposing what most parents consider the most nightmarish features of public schools on private ones, vouchers would effectively end private education and eliminate parental choice.

A free market in education—where no-one is forced to pay for anyone's education, even that of his own children—would resemble a market in any other commodity. People who wanted a certain sort of pedagogy would pay those willing to give it. When many people wanted one sort of pedagogy, which might happen quite frequently, it would probably be given in one large building, the familiar "school." Those who wanted tailor-made curricula would

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hire tutors. Highly unusual demands would cost more to meet, as does any scarce resource. Childless individuals, now forced to subsidize the education of other people's children, would bypass the market altogether, just as amputees bypass ski stores.

Religious institutions and entrepreneurs would purvey a variety of educational regimens. Popular ones—those that result in children learning what their parents want them to learn—would succeed; unpopular ones would be available cheaply, for families valuing education less highly. And controversies about the new math or phonics vs. Look-say would be deflated, because the use (i.e., imposition) of these methods on the unwilling would no longer be at issue.

Other controversies would also vanish. Right now, some people want children taught about sexual matters others regard these subjects as unsuitable for the classroom; under the public system, which mandates curricula for everyone, compromise is impossible. Whoever loses the curricular battle finds himself having to support something he abominates. A market system tells those who want their children to learn about contraception to send them to Condom High, while letting others attend Abstinence Academy. No-one need feel put-upon.

The multicultural problem also gets resolved. Minorities who feel their cultures now receive insufficient attention can form their own schools. Traditionalists convinced that America is an extension of European civilization can form theirs. Others might want a mix; in a free market, everyone wins. If minority schools turn out not to prepare children for participation in the majority culture, or some minorities cannot afford the schools they desire, majority education will become the industry standard in the non-coercive way VHS ousted Betamax.

The great objection to educational markets are parents too poor or heedless to buy little Johnny a good education. The issue, however, is not whether a sound education would be good for Johnny, but the right to force others to give it to him. Should Johnny's parents be unable or unwilling to buy him an attractive jacket, they don't have the right to force you to make up the slack. Why should it be any different for an education? Anyway, people's ideas of soundness in education differ. Perhaps Johnny's parents think they are doing right by him; that is their decision to make, not yours or mine.

Talk of conflicting values points up the irony of public schools: they work only where there is standing agreement about the goals of education and the means to achieve them. (I got a fine education from the New York Public School System back in the conformist 1950s, when the most pressing classroom problem was too little chalk, not too many knives.) But when such conditions exist, all public schools do is mimic, with all the costs of state action, what individual choice would accomplish far more efficiently. ☒

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